

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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CAMPGROUNDS FILLING FOR MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

DES MOINES – Well, it didn't take long for the electric campsites available for reservation to fill at Lake Anita, Lake Ahquabi, beach campground at Brushy Creek, Elk Rock, Ledges, Maquoketa Caves, Viking Lake, Prairie Rose and Lake of Three Fires state parks for the Memorial Day Weekend.

In less than 72 hours, campers snapped up the available sites, leaving campers on the outside to make plans to arrive early to secure a first come, first serve site.

“Our campers have really tuned in to the reservation system and are using it to get the sites they want, next to the campers they want,” said Kevin Szcodronski, chief of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) State Parks Bureau. “Campers are telling us they feel better leaving home knowing they have a campsite waiting for them and more campers are using the reservation system each year.”

The Iowa DNR's campsite reservation system will allow a person to reserve a site up to three months from their date of arrival. The campsite reservation system debuted in 2006 offering campers a mixture of electric and non electric campsites to choose from. Only half of all the campsites in a park are available for reservation, the other half are still available on a first come, first serve basis.

“If the reservation system continues to increase in popularity, we will look into increasing the number of reservable campsites in selected parks,” Szcodronski said.

Campers wanting to reserve a campsite should probably decide which park soon as other parks electric campsites available for reservation are close to filling. Information on reserving a campsite is available at www.reserveiaparks.com.

For more information, contact Szcodronski at 515-281-8674.

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WINTERING HAWKS TAKE BIRD FEEDING TO ITS HIGHEST LEVEL

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

It was a scene to warm the heart of any backyard birder. The late winter snow storm had ended, skies were clearing, and the feeders were busy. Nuthatches, chickadees, finches, cardinals, and a half dozen other songbird species were boisterously competing for the high energy mix of sunflower seeds and cracked corn.

Then, in the blink of an eye, the morning tranquility was shattered as a larger bird form burst on the scene. The latest arrival was a sharp-shinned hawk. Although the diminutive raptor was barely the size of an adult blue jay, its appearance prompted an immediate panic.

In a sudden explosion of wings, every bird fled for its life. Although the mass exodus should have created some sense of confusion, the raptor had already chosen its target. The chase was both brief and spectacular. In less time than it takes to relate, the sharp-shinned had out raced and seized its meal, which in this case was a plump junco.

Variations of this scenario are repeated daily across all regions of Iowa. In almost all cases, the hawks chasing backyard birds are either sharp-shinned or Cooper's hawks. Both are woodland species characterized by short wings, long tails, and extreme, but short, bursts of speed.

When observed by humans, the reaction to these “True Life Adventures” often becomes charged with emotion. Many incidents result in a phone call to the local conservation officer or DNR wildlife biologist.

As a number of those calls are forwarded, I have an opportunity to chat with a lot of interesting folks from across the state. February and early March often generate the most calls. This year, I've received more “backyard hawk” calls than any winter during the past 20-plus years.

A minority of callers [all males but for two exceptions] are thrilled at having a chance to witness the predator/prey relationship play out in their very own backyards. They mainly call just to share what they saw --- like the sharp-shinned hawk snagging a junco. For nearly all, the event represents a first time opportunity to observe as a wild hawk chases, catches, plucks, and finally consumes its prey.

The vast majority of callers, however, have a very different view. They are anything but thrilled. Most are frustrated. Nearly all are angry [some extremely so] over what they perceive as the calculated murder of innocent songbirds at the hands, or more properly the talons, of a ruthless hawk.

I must admit that it's hard to argue against fact. Songbirds *are* innocent. Hawks *are* ruthless. But another fact, and this where some of the phone conversations start going south, is that hawks chasing and eating other birds is just part of the natural order and is how the food chain works.

In order to meet calorie demands and survive the rigors of an Iowa winter, all birds --- including birds of prey --- must become adept at exploiting existing food supplies. Once snow cover and cold weather arrives, it doesn't take long for neighborhood birds to key in on sets of well maintained feeders. The word spreads, and large flocks soon concentrate.

Hawks do the same. The only difference is that, instead of feeding at the birdseed end of the buffet line, they go straight for the red meat.

Here's a thumbnail version of the natural food chain in action. Put out lots of bird seed, and you attract lots of birds. Attract lots of birds, and you just might attract a roving hawk.

Attracting a hawk is not bad. To the contrary, it is a sure sign that your bird feeding program is successful. I like to think of hawks as taking backyard bird feeding to its next, and highest, level.

Whenever a wintering hawk arrives in your backyard, one of two things will happen. The hawk will either chase and catch, or it will chase and miss, its meal. After that, the raptor will move on to quietly digest its food or to look for more things to chase. In either event, normal bird feeder activity will resume within minutes.

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CHECKOFF FACES HURDLES

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Another blast of winter air. Yet another layer of snow. If you have a few bird feeders in the yard, you probably notice a crowd around them. You trudge through the snow restocking each with seed and suet. It helps the birds get through another day.

Still, perhaps the most 'wildlife friendly' thing you can do this winter occurs inside. That would be checking the box marked Fish & Wildlife Fund, as you prepare your income taxes this winter. That checkoff (shown only as Fish/Wildlife on line 13 of the 'short' form, but Fish & Wildlife Fund on line 58A on the 'longer' 1040) designates funding for the Wildlife Diversity Program, within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

These are the songbirds, amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and other 'nongame' species which often fall through the cracks, when it comes to wildlife management and research. Hunting and fishing license revenue and excise fees on sales of everything from firearms to fishing tackle benefit overall *game* populations. Purchase of vital habitat, research into what can improve their numbers, enforcement of fish and game laws...and much more...come through those sources.

Nongame species, on the other hand are the weak siblings, so to speak, in the fight for funding, attention and other benefits. That's why the checkoff—originally known as the Chickadee Checkoff—was established more than 20 years ago. Trumpeter swans and peregrine falcons are a couple of the high profile success stories; with numbers and habitat restored over time.

But that checkoff, which supports more than 500 species that are not hunted or fished, is in trouble. In the early years, Iowa taxpayers chipped in \$200,000 even \$220,000 in a tax year. That had dipped to about \$140,000 over the last few years. Last winter, contributions from the 2006 tax year dropped to \$107,000. "There are a number of reasons, we think, for the drop in contributions," assesses Doug Harr, coordinator of the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. "There are more checkoffs on the income tax form. People only have so much money they are willing to earmark. As more choices are added, they all tend to drop."

In past years, colorful posters went out to tax preparation offices across the state, with a pitch to ask customers to contribute. Now, many don't even ask the question, unless the customer brings it up. "Some tax preparers charge by the line," notes Harr. "If it's going to cost another dollar or two just to contribute, that's a hindrance." Online tax programs have become very popular. The one Harr uses prompts him at the checkoff; probably recognizing earlier contributions. "If I'm a taxpayer using the program for the first time," he asks, "how would I know what to do, if it doesn't prompt me?"

There is a boost provided by that portion of the state's chickadee, pheasant and bald eagle license plates; the 'REAP' plates. That can provide a match for federal wildlife grants. Those grants are earmarked for specific projects, though, not the day to day expenses. That makes it hard to get help to the species which need it most. For every

trumpeter swan or river otter (now recovered to the point it is classed as a 'game' animal) that makes headlines or ends up on TV, there are dozens of grassland songbirds, salamanders, darters and butterflies that feed on the crumbs from the funding table. Their habitats are often in trouble, too; wetlands, grasslands which are disappearing or dropping in quality.

"There is still time to make a difference," underscores Harr, with most Iowans rounding up their receipts, forms and other data needed to tackle their 2007 returns.

Who Gives?

The average contributor to Iowa's Fish & Wildlife Fund is a middle-aged, urban resident. "From 2001 through 2006, the average person who contributed was in the age group 51 to 55 years old," says Stephanie Shepherd, with the DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. "In 'second' place are the 46 to 50 year olds followed by those 56 to 60."

Polk County, with the largest population in the state, listed 2,655 taxpayers as contributing \$27,519...over one-fourth of the total 2006 tax year donations to the Fish and Wildlife Fund. The top five counties accounted for *nearly 72 percent* of the total.

County	Contributors	\$ Total	Average
Polk.	2,655	27,519	\$10.36
Linn	1,212	13,403	\$11.06
Johnson	1,154	17,539	\$15.20
Story	781	11,888	\$15.22
Scott	517	6,324	\$12.23

Southeast Iowa...Amphibian, Reptile Hot Spot

With the confluence of two major rivers, eventually flowing into the Mississippi River, wildlife diversity biologists are focusing a lot of attention on the state's first Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area (ARCA).

"It takes in much of the lower Iowa and Cedar rivers, and below their junction, part of the Mississippi. All maps and data show it as the hot spot for herpetology (the science of amphibians and reptiles)," explains DNR Wildlife Diversity coordinator Doug Harr.

The area of about 450,000 acres of mostly flood plain will be subject to studies to learn more about salamanders, frogs, turtles, snakes and a wide variety of other 'herps.' The studies hope to identify the best ways to manage and protect the habitat for those species. Right now, little is known about them. The multi-agency effort will work with private landowners when ever possible, as well as the core of public land through the region.

The effort is similar to those in several Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs) in Iowa. Harr learned just a week ago, that it not only is a 'first' in Iowa...but is the first certified ARCA in the country.

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YOUNG ARCHERS VIE FOR STATE CHAMPIONSHIP MARCH 1

DES MOINES - The National Archery in the Schools Program Iowa State Archery Championships will be held during the Iowa Deer Classic, Feb. 29-March 2 at Hy-Vee Hall, in Des Moines. The tournament is the annual state "culminating event" for schools participating in the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP). The basic foundation of the NASP is the in-school archery unit. All schools that offer archery as part of the in-school curriculum are qualified to compete in the tournament that takes place on March 1, as part of the Iowa Deer Classic.

"The National Archery in the Schools Program is gaining popularity in Iowa and across the country with over four million students participating," said Ben Berka, Shooting Sports Coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. "Conducting the NASP State Championship event at the Iowa Deer Classic showcases the talents of these kids and also gives them the opportunity to explore other types of target archery and bowhunting by visiting vendors, displays, and attending seminars while at the show."

An estimated 250 kids, with divisions for high school (grades 9-12), middle school (7-8), and elementary (K-6), are expected to take part in this first year event, with prizes being awarded for both individual and team efforts. The top boy and girl senior archers will each receive a \$1,000 scholarship prize.

For more information, contact Berka at 515-281-0140.

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JOIN THE 9TH ANNUAL PRAIRIE RESCUE EVENT

DES MOINES - Volunteers of all ages will help "rescue" prairie at more than 15 sites throughout Iowa during March, April and May.

This annual event is coordinated by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with support from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, county conservation boards and private conservation groups.

For a complete listing of all Iowa Prairie Rescue sites, visit the Prairie Rescue website at www.inhf.org/prairierescue2008.html. The events are also listed on the Iowa DNR Keepers of the Land *events calendar* at www.iowadnr.com/volunteer/index.html.

Today, only about 1/1,000th of Iowa's prairie remains. These small prairie remnants, even those in public ownership, are still at risk from encroaching species and the lack of historic fire and grazing patterns.

Volunteers will clear invasive species such as brush and small trees from the sites. Experts will conduct controlled burns on some of the prairies. These efforts will allow adults and kids to experience the prairies Iowa's earlier generations saw, while preserving that experience for future generations.

Questions may be directed to Whitney Davis, Iowa DNR, at 515-281-6271 or Whitney.Davis@dnr.iowa.gov

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DEER ANTLER SCORING AT RATHBUN EVENT

MORAVIA – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources biologists and conservation officers will hold a trophy deer antler measuring seminar on March 15, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., at the Rathbun Fish Hatchery. Antlers will be scored from deer taken in Iowa from any year in the past.

Official scorers for Boone and Crocket, Pope and Young and the DNR will be present and all eligible antlers will be entered into the record book.

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Iowa Fishing Report

www.iowadnr.gov

February 26, 2008

Ice fishing reports are issued every other week while quality ice conditions exist. For current information on ice fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Ice conditions on Pools 9-11 are solid with 24 inches of ice on most backwaters. Ice fishing has been slower over the past week. On

Pool 10 Bussey Lake reports slow fishing except right before dark with a few crappies being caught. The spillway above Harper's Ferry has had slow to good fishing with a few crappies being caught there also. Due to the ice cover there has been no open water fishing for walleye at lock and dam 10 in Guttenberg.

Sweet Marsh, aka Marten's Lake (Bremer): Crappies are biting jigs tipped with a wax worm or minnow.

Fish have been caught in **George Wyth Lake, Big Woods Lake, South Prairie Lake, Meyer Lake** and **Casey Lake**, all in Black Hawk County.

Brinker Lake (Black Hawk): Fishing has been good for crappie, bluegill and channel catfish with the most action in the early morning and before sundown. Channel catfish have been caught suspended so try jigging well off of the bottom.

Avenue of the Saints Lake (Bremer): Fishing is good for crappies and bluegills. The fish are abundant, but are on the small side.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): Bluegills and crappies are good. Delhi has a consistent bite when other lakes are slow.

Lake Meyer (Winneshiek): Fishing has slowed but anglers are still having success. Fish are still suspended around brush piles. Try using a red jig with a white tail. The best time to fish continues to be early morning and late afternoon.

Hendricks Lake (Howard): Fishing has slowed quite a bit. The best fishing is early morning or late evening.

Volga Lake (Fayette): Fishing has been slow.

Trout streams are open, accessible and fishable.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 20: Tailwater stage in **Pool 16** has fallen close to one-foot over the weekend to 5.67 feet. As of this past weekend the Marquette St. boat ramp was still accessible. There are reports of anglers catching limits of walleyes and saugers below Lock and Dam 15, using jig/minnow combinations and night crawlers. Some crappies and bluegills are being caught through the ice at **Credit Island**. With the recent warm weather and predicted rain this week use caution when venturing out on the ice.

In **Pool 17**, tailwater stage is at 4.88 feet and is forecasted to slowly fall over the week. Some walleyes and saugers are being caught in the tailwaters below the Lock and Dam 16 using jig and minnow combinations and night crawlers. As of this past weekend, there was one lane open to the city ramp at Muscatine and boats were accessing the river.

Tailwater stage in **Pool 18** is 7.22 feet. There were reports of anglers catching walleyes and saugers below Lock and Dam 17 over the weekend. There may be limited access at the Toolesboro landing due to ice chunks.

In **Pool 19**, tailwater stage is 4.20 feet and is forecasted to fall slowly over the next week. Walleyes and saugers are being caught below Lock and Dam 18 on jig and minnow combinations. In **Pool 20**, tailwater stage is 4.6 feet but water levels fluctuate due to dam releases. No fishing report.

Lake Darling (Washington): There is about 12 inches of ice, some of which formed from the rain and snow mix from last week. There are a few anglers working the

middle of the lake over the culvert piles and cedar trees, mostly catching crappies suspended a couple feet off the bottom.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Fishing has slowed with not much angler activity. Part of the reason for the lack of activity is when they drill through the ice, water rushes through leaving them sitting in a pile of slush.

Lake Geode (Henry): This has been a rare year where there has been more than a couple weeks of ice fishing on Geode. Anglers are working the area straight out from the concession stand and the bay straight north of the main boat ramp. They seem to be doing fairly well on bluegills and redears.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Crappie fishing has picked up a little with anglers having some success in Buck Creek and Honey Creek. Most crappies being caught are around some type of underwater structure and are hitting on jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Crappies and bluegills have been hitting on jigs tipped with wax worms. Try a variety of depths. There is some open water in the main lake area so use caution.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Bluegills have been biting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow. Fish the underwater structure for the best success.

Lake Keomah (Mahaska): Bluegills have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. Try a variety of depths and look for areas with some underwater habitat.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

Southwest

Big Creek (Polk): Fishing has slowed but crappies are still being caught fishing small jigs tipped with a minnow or wax worm in 30 feet of water the best bites are from dusk on. Bluegills up to 9 inches are being caught fishing over the cedar tree piles or other structure on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. A few walleyes are being caught fishing with minnows.

Hickory Grove (Story): Fishing has been slow; a few bluegills are being caught fishing near structure using small jigs tipped with a wax worm.

Don Williams (Story): Fishing has been slow. Bluegills are being caught fishing near structure during the day using small jigs tipped with a wax worm. Crappies are being caught around dusk.

Ahquabi (Warren): Bluegills up to 10 inches and a few redears are being caught fish structure during the day.

Rock Creek (Jasper): Crappies are being caught fishing structure at dusk. Bluegills are being caught during the day using small jigs tipped with a wax worm.

Contact: Ben Dodd (515) 432-2823, Ext.108, for information on the ABOVE area lakes.

Fogle Lake (Ringgold): Ice conditions are good. A few bluegills are being caught in deeper water near structure with wax worms and minnows. Some crappies can be caught but are usually suspended at various depths.

Lake of Three Fires (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. Lots of nice bluegills are being caught with wax over the tree pile 100 yards north of the center of the dam.

Crappies can be caught using minnows suspended at various depths near the tree piles or along the old creek channel.

Icaria (Adams): Ice conditions are good. A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows. Some walleye activity has centered on the old road bed that crosses the main arm.

Three Mile Lake (Union): Ice conditions are good. Good numbers of bluegills are being caught next to deep structure on wax worms. Crappies seem to be harder to find, but a few crappies are also being caught next to deep structure or from the old road bed edges. Some perch have been caught near the pump house point.

Twelve Mile Lake (Union): Ice conditions are good. Nice bluegills are being caught with wax worms on 15 to 18 foot flats or from the sides of the old road beds. Some real nice crappies have been caught suspended over the old road beds on minnows. Some walleye have been picked up on the old road beds.

Badger Creek (Madison): Some nice bluegills have been caught on wax worms during mid day.

Walnut Creek Marsh (Ringgold): Some real nice bluegills and crappies can be caught from water depths that are usually less than 4 feet. The fish are extremely shallow.

Farm ponds have had variable reports.

Contact: Gary Sobotka (641)464-3108 for information on the ABOVE area lakes.

Ice conditions have been reported as good with area lakes having 12 to 15 inches.

Greenfield Lake (Adair): Bluegill and crappie have been fair. Try small jigs tipped with wax worms or minnows around structure in 16 to 20 feet of water.

Anita (Cass): Bluegills have been fair with 7 to 8-inch fish being reported.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Fishing is good with 9 to 12-inch crappies being caught on jigs and minnows.

Anderson Area/North Pond (Montgomery): Bluegills are good with reports of 8-inch fish being caught on teardrops tipped with a wax worm. Crappies have been fair on using minnows.

Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds: The best fishing reports have been from privately owned small ponds for bluegill and in the larger ponds, crappie, using teardrops tipped with wax worm. Ice thickness is 15 inches.

Contact: Bryan Hayes (712)769-2587 for information on the ABOVE area lakes.

For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Northwest

Walleye season on West Okoboji, East Okoboji and Spirit lakes in Dickinson County closed Feb. 15. It will re-open on May 2.

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Bluegills are fair on the Grade, Trickles Slough and Anglers Bay. Anglers are catching a few crappies in Trickles Slough

West Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Bluegill fishing is fair off Pocahontas Point, Millers Bay and the North Bay using wax worms. A few yellow perch are being caught in Emerson Bay.

Crawford Creek (Ida): Bluegill and crappie fishing is fair. Early morning and late afternoon and evening are best.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Fishing is fair for walleyes on live minnows under a bobber.

Brushy Creek (Webster): Crappies have been caught 2 to 3 feet off the bottom using a wax worm or a minnow. The best fishing is early in the morning or during the evening hours. Bluegills are biting on a wax worm on a small tear drop. Some sorting is required.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Walleye fishing has been fair. Walleye are hitting the best at the sunrise and sunset periods using minnows on jigging spoons. Fishing in the central portion of the lake between the Island and Dodge's Point and over to the north shore is producing the best. Some anglers are catching walleye in the mud flats, away from the crowds. Remember Clear Lake has a 14-inch minimum length on walleye with only one of the fish over 22 inches with a daily limit of three. Yellow bass fishing has been fair using jigging spoons tipped with a minnow head around the Island. The best time for yellows has been the hour of sunrise, but fish are being caught in the sunset period as well. Anglers are catching an occasional white bass, catfish, crappie and yellow perch.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

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